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Alaska Air Guard awards First Sergeant of the Year

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska — Alaska National Guard Airman, Master Sgt. Melissa Erhard, was awarded the 2019 First Sergeant of the Year award Sept. 15 for her accomplishments last year.

As an Anchorage resident and Arizona native, Erhard has been a first sergeant with the 176th Air Defense Squadron since October 2015.

Erhard is the only first sergeant in the unit of more than 150 personnel. Uniquely, she is one of only three full-time first sergeants in the entire Alaska Air National Guard.

"I consider Master Sgt. Erhard an indispensable asset for myself and the unit," said Lt. Col. Shane Wallace, commander of the 176th ADS. "She adroitly navigates the spectrum from taking care of our people to ensuring good order and discipline, all in order for us to accomplish our core missions of Homeland Defense and Air Sovereignty for Alaska and the United States."

Erhard has distinguished herself through her ability to foster resiliency among her Airmen and community. In 2019, she amassed more than 24-thousand dollars in donations and dispensed Thanksgiving meals to more than 500 families in need, on base and in the local community. She also helped raise more than 30-thousand dollars in emergency funds for JBER members in need through Operation Warm Heart, a first sergeant program that grants cash, gift cards and food vouchers to Airmen, Air Force civilians and contractors from Thanksgiving through Christmas.

"Master Sgt Erhard embodies the Air Force's Core Values of Integrity First, Service Before Self, and Excellence in All We Do," said Chief Master Sgt. Heather Pineiro, chief enlisted manager for the 176th ADS. "Her heartfelt compassion and steadfast dedication to the men and women in the 176th Wing is unmatched, both as a first sergeant and a senior noncommissioned officer. I am honored to work alongside her and trust in her guidance and support with enlisted personnel matters."

To develop her own professional ambitions and to bolster unit readiness, Erhard attended 10 courses in 2019 that refined her team building and mentorship skills. She developed a first sergeant annual training course for 17 first sergeants and taught at base-wide seminars that focused on mentoring fellow noncommissioned officers.

"Master Sgt. Erhard is the dedicated first sergeant for the 176th ADS but she also supports all six squadrons in the Operations Group with more than 500 personnel," said Chief Master Sgt. Brandon

Grisham, 176th Operations Group Superintendent. “She has always been a sounding board for all squadron commanders and chiefs when they needed a listening ear.”

As a leader, Erhard places families at the forefront. She responded to three domestic disputes in 2019, and obtained shelter for displaced members of several families. When one of her Airmen’s spouse suddenly passed away, she mobilized support resources for the Airman to ease their grief.

“Master Sgt. Erhard aligns and strengthens the command team, setting the example for other senior non-commissioned officers as first sergeants to emulate,” remarked Chief Master Sgt. Christopher Wilson, State Command Chief for the AKANG.

Col. John Oberst, director of staff for the AKANG, and Wilson presented Erhard with a trophy and commander’s coin on behalf Brig. Gen. Scott Howard, commander of the AKANG, thanking her for her exemplary dedication and service to the people that perform the daily mission for the state of Alaska and the nation.

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PHOTOS

1. **Attached pdf** includes story and a small selection of low-resolution photos for viewing on screen.
2. **Story link:** <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/6356230/alaska-air-guard-first-sergeant-year>



Alaska Air National Guard Lt. Col. Shane Wallace, commander of the 176th Air Defense Squadron, and Chief Master Sgt. Heather Pineiro, chief enlisted manager assigned to the 176th ADS, stand beside First Sgt. Melissa Erhard, the Alaska Air National Guard's 2019 First Sergeant of the Year, Sept. 15, 2020 on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson. Erhard distinguished herself in 2019 through her ability to foster resiliency among her Airmen and her community. The red stars in the backdrop represent the number of Russian intercepts made by the unit through the years, whose mission is to defend the nation's air sovereignty in the region. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Seth LaCount/Released)